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# A FREE FUTURE FOR THE WORLD.

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A SPEECH

by

The Rt. Hon. H. H. ASQUITH,  
Prime Minister,

AT

THE GUILDHALL,

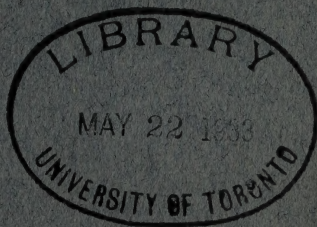
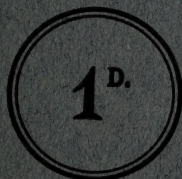
ON THE

9th NOVEMBER, 1916.

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(Published by Authority.)

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T. FISHER UNWIN, LTD.,  
1, ADELPHI TERRACE, LONDON.

1916.





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You, my Lord Mayor, have said this is the ninth year in succession in which it has been my duty and my privilege to respond in the Guildhall to this toast. So far as my memory serves me, upon each occasion there have been at the time special and exceptional causes for anxiety, or at least disquietude, either domestic or external. I remember, years ago, acclaiming with premature and, as events have proved, ill-founded satisfaction the triumph of what was called the Young Turk Movement over the spy-ridden and blood-stained tyranny of Abdul Hamid. We hoped in those days for the regeneration of the Ottoman Empire from within. Our hopes have been falsified and frustrated, and I believe we all now realise that the continuance of Turkish rule in Europe where the Turk has always been a stranger and intruder, has already come to mean, and, if it is allowed to persist, will increasingly mean, that the Turk is there only as a vassal and a subservient agent of German interest and ambitions.

Allow me to give you one practical illustration, and it is a very tragic one. Among the enslaved races who have suffered most from the Ottoman domination are the Armenians, the wholesale massacre



of whom during the last two years has shocked the entire civilised and Christian world. In our own country, in Russia, and I believe even more in the United States of America, the incredible sufferings of this nation have aroused profound sympathy, and all three countries have raised large sums for their relief and their repatriation in the future. I need not say that His Majesty's Government look with profound sympathy on these efforts, and are resolved that after the war there shall be an era of liberty and redemption for this ancient people. But Germany, the master of Turkey, who by lifting a finger could have arrested and, if she wished, prevented this organised campaign of outrage and massacre against a Christian people—Germany has looked on unmoved, quiescent, for all we know complacent. That is a significant example of what is meant by a Germanised Turkey.

I remember also uttering in this hall, as a guest of one of your predecessors, a protest on behalf of the public law of Europe against the unauthorised and unsanctioned breach of that law in the appropriation by the Austro-Hungarian Empire of the provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina. These events now belong to the history of the past; but, though we did not, and could not, foresee it then, they helped our enemies in a way to prepare and to mature the seed-bed of the troubles that are now afflicting

Europe, and which threaten, unless we successfully intervene, the bankruptcy of civilisation. In making that brief review, I purposely say nothing of our own old differences here at home. They were serious, they were acute. They divided parties. They aroused deep-seated and wide-spread animosities among us ; but real as they were—for Englishmen do not fight about trifles—they are now one and all submerged, buried, may I not say they are now extinct and under the constraining stress of the greatest issue in our history.

### THE MILITARY POSITION.

I am not going to-night to attempt any survey of the naval and military situation. Our Fleet, of which my right hon. friend and colleague has spoken, remote and unadvertised, but vigilant and omnipresent, maintains an ever-tightening grip on the inlets of enemy supplies, and is ready, and more than ready, whenever the opportunity offers to try conclusions with them on the open seas. Our gallant Armies, of which Lord French has spoken, in all the different theatres have never shown more conspicuously their title to maintain and illuminate and transcend the best traditions of our past, and in this titanic struggle on the Somme, with its daily record of unforgettable examples of

personal and corporate heroism, they are ever gaining ground and never yielding an inch. At Salonika and in Egypt, in Mesopotamia and in East Africa, further removed though they are from the immediate ken of their countrymen, their record is the same.

And what of our Allies? France is fighting shoulder to shoulder with us on the Somme: and, as we have been already reminded to-night, in the course of little more than a fortnight she has annihilated the whole result of eight months of prodigious and costly effort by the enemy before Verdun. Italy is steadily and surely advancing on Trieste. Russia maintains with undiminished energy and valour her colossal task. Japan has achieved great things already, and is powerfully supporting, by supplies and in other ways, the common effort. Let me associate myself with what the French Ambassador has said of our latest Ally, Rumania, to whom we offer a special tribute of gratitude and admiration for her splendid and tenacious stand. The Serbians are playing a worthy part, and have never more honourably displayed the indomitable qualities of their race. Portugal, our most ancient Ally, is contributing her share to the common cause.



## THE ALLIES AND GREECE.

With regard to another country—Greece—I speak with hope, and I wish I could speak with confidence. As all the world knows, we and our French Allies did not go to Salonika as invaders and trespassers. We went there with the assent of the Greek Government, and as the friends of both Serbia and Greece. We have not, we never have had, any quarrel—on the contrary, we have a sincere and traditional friendship with Greece as one of the Guaranteeing Powers of her independence and freedom. We desire at one and the same time to prevent her being enmeshed in the German net and to save her from the calamities of intestine strife. Whatever the measures, apparently of a drastic character, the Allies have taken, have been dictated solely by the necessity of preventing Athens from becoming, or rather I ought to say from continuing to be, the focus and centre of German propaganda and intrigue.

I say quite frankly—it is no good mincing words about this—I say quite frankly, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, we are in hearty sympathy with that great Greek patriot, M. Venizelos. He has assured us, and we fully accept his assurance, that his efforts and his organisation have no anti-dynastic purpose. His governing, I believe his sole,

object is that in this world struggle the Greeks shall play a worthy part on the side of freedom and in the progressive development on the lines of independence and of liberty of the Eastern European communities. This is a war among other things, perhaps I may say primarily, a war for the emancipation of the smaller States. How can Greece in such a conflict stand aside? The one aim of the Allies and of those who, like ourselves, are guaranteeing Powers is that we should be once more in the position with regard to Greece in which we stood with M. Venizelos as Prime Minister when we went to Salonika. It was Hellas who first among the nations of Europe lit the torch of liberty and withstood the onslaught of Eastern barbarism and tyranny. Barbarism and tyranny are the secular enemies of what is best in humanity, whether they issue from the East or the West, whether they come naked and unabashed as in the old days or whether they come, as they do now, draped and disguised in the costume of culture. May Greece rekindle her lamp and show herself worthy of her immortal past!

Let me, before I end, say a few words on the more general aspect of the situation. Our enemies, as Lord French has said, are great organisers and fine fighters in the field of war; but they are also, I will not say skilful, but indefatigable, workers in a far

different sphere—the sphere of propaganda. In that sphere, a very important one for their purpose, they have the double object of dividing the Allies and, if they can, of capturing neutral opinion for themselves.

## GERMAN PROPAGANDA.

Let me deal in a sentence with the second point first. It is suggested in neutral countries that we Allies have a sinister design after the war is over to combine against them, and to build up an impenetrable stone wall against their trade. That is a childish fiction, for if it were true it would mean that we are, one and all, bent on economic suicide. It ought to be unnecessary to affirm, but I am afraid it is necessary to affirm, that when the time comes for peace nothing will be more essential to the Allies from the standpoint of simple self-interest than to establish and maintain the best industrial and financial relations with the neutral Powers.

The real purpose of German propaganda being, as we know it is, in each of the belligerent countries, to incite a movement in favour of a separate peace, different arguments are put forward in different places. Here, for instance, in Great Britain, it was insinuated that Germany is prepared to restore the independence of Belgium and to give her



compensation, that on that basis a reasonable peace could be secured, so far as the particular British *casus belli* is concerned, and that we are being dragged on by our Allies into a continuation of the war in order to secure the special aspirations, say, of France or Russia or Italy, in which we have no direct concern or interest. Let me observe, in passing, that we are equally pledged to the reconstitution and independence of Serbia, and, so far as I am aware, no German propagandist here has even suggested that the German Government is prepared to concede anything to this demand.

But I wish to declare on behalf of the Government of Great Britain, without hesitation or reserve, that the Allies are fighting for a common cause ; that for the purposes of the war their interests are our interests, as we believe that our interests are theirs ; and that a victory which will secure them all is, in our judgment, the essential condition of a lasting and enduring peace.

#### MISREPRESENTATION IN RUSSIA.

In the Allied countries, and particularly perhaps in Russia, the method of the German propagandist is just the reverse. There we are represented as the Power which is anxious to continue the war and to

prevent the possibility either of a separate or a general peace. We are held out as lending money to the Allies on usurious terms, as making huge profits out of the munitions and other commodities which we supply, and out of the shipping in which they are carried ; as fulfilling the traditional *rôle* ascribed to us more than 100 years ago by Napoleon as “ a nation of hucksters and shopkeepers,” as exploiting without scruple or measure the necessities of our brother-combatants. It is difficult for us here to imagine that this can be regarded as a plausible or even a credible hypothesis—for us, who know with much bitter knowledge what the war actually means to us day by day, the upheaval of our whole national life, the absorption and extinction of thousands of millions of accumulated and prospective wealth, the tribute which almost every family among us is paying in precious lives, of hopes hardly yet in blossom or in their earliest flower, in the unceasing and pitiless drain upon our reservoir of potential promise and vitality. Who has greater reason than we have to long and to pray for peace ?

Peace, yes ; but on one condition only—that the war with its waste and sacrifices, its untold sufferings, its glorious and undying examples of courage and unselfishness—shall not have been in vain. There can be no question of any separate peace. And the peace when it comes, be it soon or be it late—and I

will not disguise from you for a moment my conviction that the struggle will tax all our resources and our whole stock of patience and resolve—the peace when it comes must be such as will build upon a sure and stable foundation the security of the weak, the liberties of Europe, and a free future for the world.





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